

## Alaska Trial Court Caseload FY 2007–2018

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This fact sheet presents data on criminal case filings in Alaska trial courts for fiscal years 2007–2018. These data come from the Alaska Court System, which publishes annual reports that summarize court activity and statistics for each fiscal year (July 1 to June 30). Note that all references to years in this report designate fiscal years.

The Alaska Court System is responsible for administering the state Supreme Court, appellate courts, and trial courts with general and limited jurisdiction. Trial courts—which are comprised of superior and district courts—process a wide variety of cases, from small claims civil cases to violent felonies. The vast majority of court activity in Alaska, when measured as volume of cases processed, occurs in state trial courts.

The two types of trial courts handle different types of cases. Superior courts generally undertake more serious

cases than do district courts. The Alaska superior courts handle felonies, probate cases, domestic relations, and children's matters (delinquency cases, terminations of parental rights, and children in need of aid cases). The state district courts, by contrast, handle all misdemeanor criminal cases, infractions for which offenders are given a citation, and municipal code violations, as well as conducting the initial stages of felony proceedings. Both types of courts also handle a range of civil cases that include torts, property, contracts, and many others.

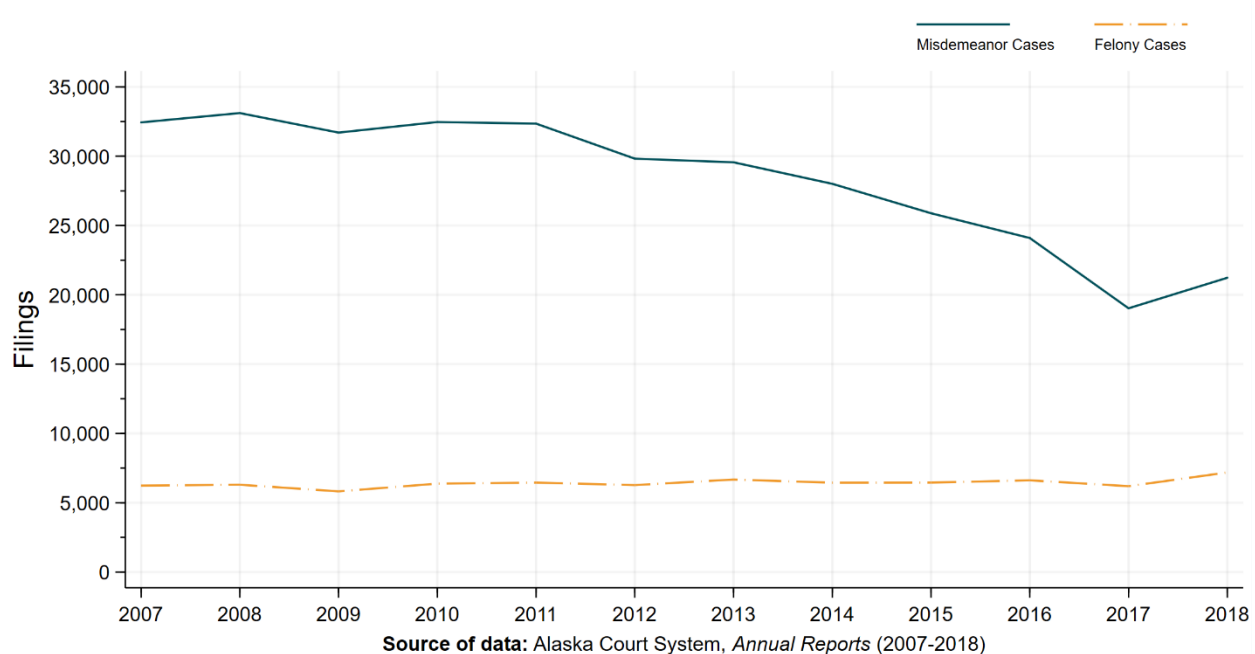
### Misdemeanor and Felony Filings

Figure 1 shows the trend in misdemeanor and felony case filings for FY 2007–2018.

Misdemeanor offenses are defined as less serious criminal offenses and can carry a penalty of imprisonment of

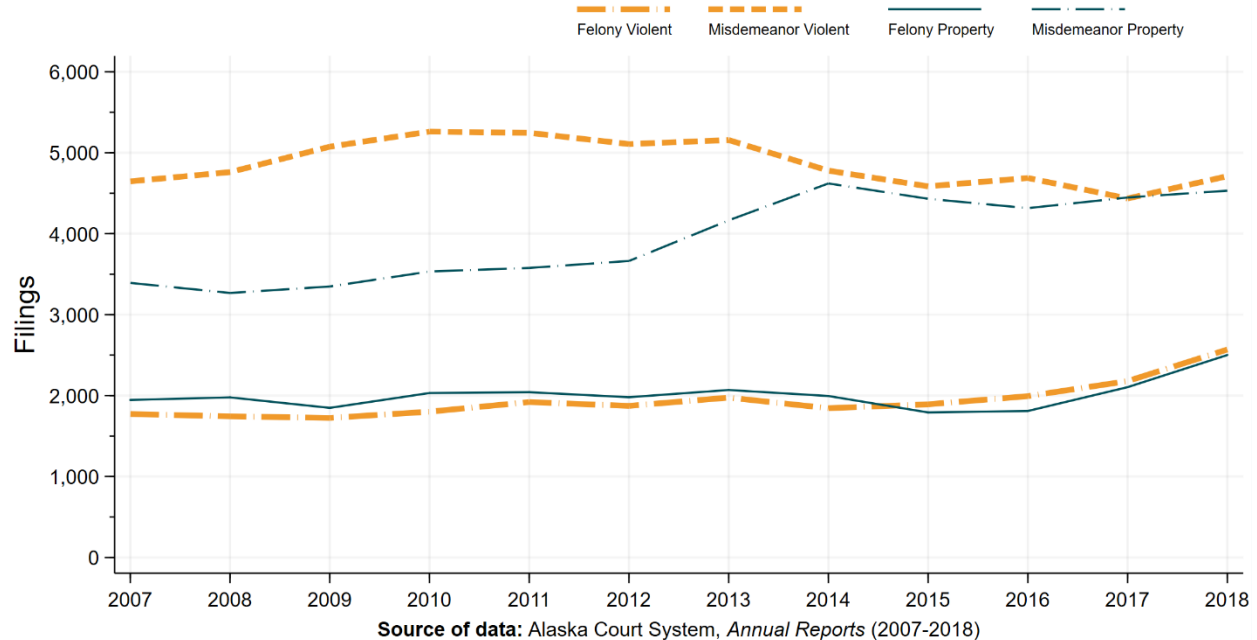
**Figure 1**

Filings in Alaska Trial Courts FY 2007-2018



**Figure 2**

Violent and Property Filings FY 2007-2018



up to a year, a fine, probation, community service, restitution, or a combination thereof.

Alaska's misdemeanor case filings were stable until 2011, after which they declined until 2017 (32,353 misdemeanor filings in 2011 to 19,030 misdemeanor filings in 2017, a decrease of 41.2%), with a modest 11.6% increase in 2018 to 21,232 misdemeanor case filings. Felony cases display a different trajectory. The trend in felony filings was more stable than that of misdemeanor filings, and

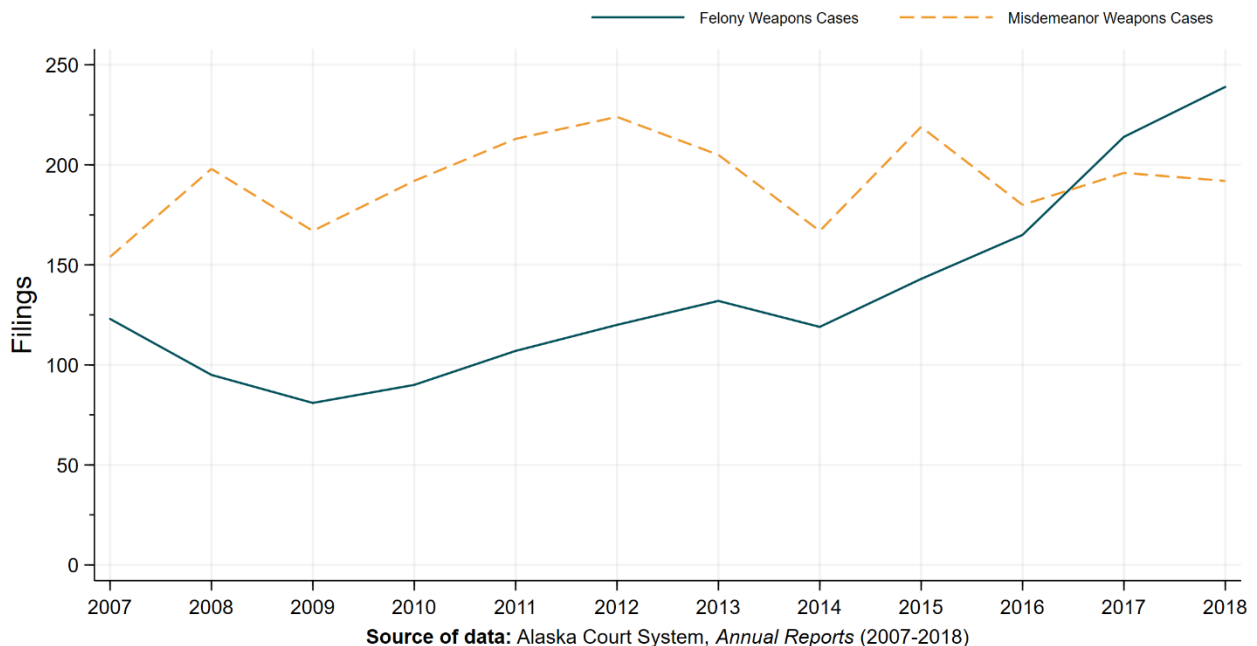
increased. From 2007 to 2018 the number of felony cases filed with the Superior Court increased by 15.2%, from 6,239 to 7,186.

### Increasing or Stable Case Trends — Violent, Property, and Weapons Cases

Figure 2 focuses on case types that stayed stable or increased from FY 2007 to 2018 in Alaska trial courts. Figure 2 shows violent crime cases and property crime cases. Both felony violent and felony property cases increased

**Figure 3**

Felony and Misdemeanor Weapons Case Filings FY 2007-2018



from FY 2007 to 2018. The number of felony violent case filings increased from 1,772 in 2007 to 2,569 in 2018 (an increase of 45%).

The number of felony property case filings increased from 1,946 in 2007 to 2,501 in 2018 (an increase of 28.5%). Misdemeanor property cases also increased by 33.6% in the same time period (from 3,392 in 2007 to 4,531 in 2018), as did misdemeanor violent cases, by 1.4% (from 4,647 to 4,710).

Figure 3 shows the trends in weapons cases—the only case type in this analysis that increased at both the felony and misdemeanor level.

The Alaska Court System describes this class of cases as comprising 1) misconduct involving weapons, 2) criminal possession of explosives, and 3) unlawful furnishing of explosives. Misdemeanor weapons cases increased by 24.7% (from 154 to 192) between 2007 and 2018; felony weapons cases increased by 94.3% (from 123 to 239). As the figure indicates, most of the increase in felonies occurred from 2014 to 2018, around the same time that violent felony cases began increasing.

### Decreasing Case Trends — Drugs, Public Order, DUI and Other Motor Vehicle Cases

Figure 4 shows the case types that decreased from FY 2007 to FY 2018. Drug cases rose from 2007 to 2013 and

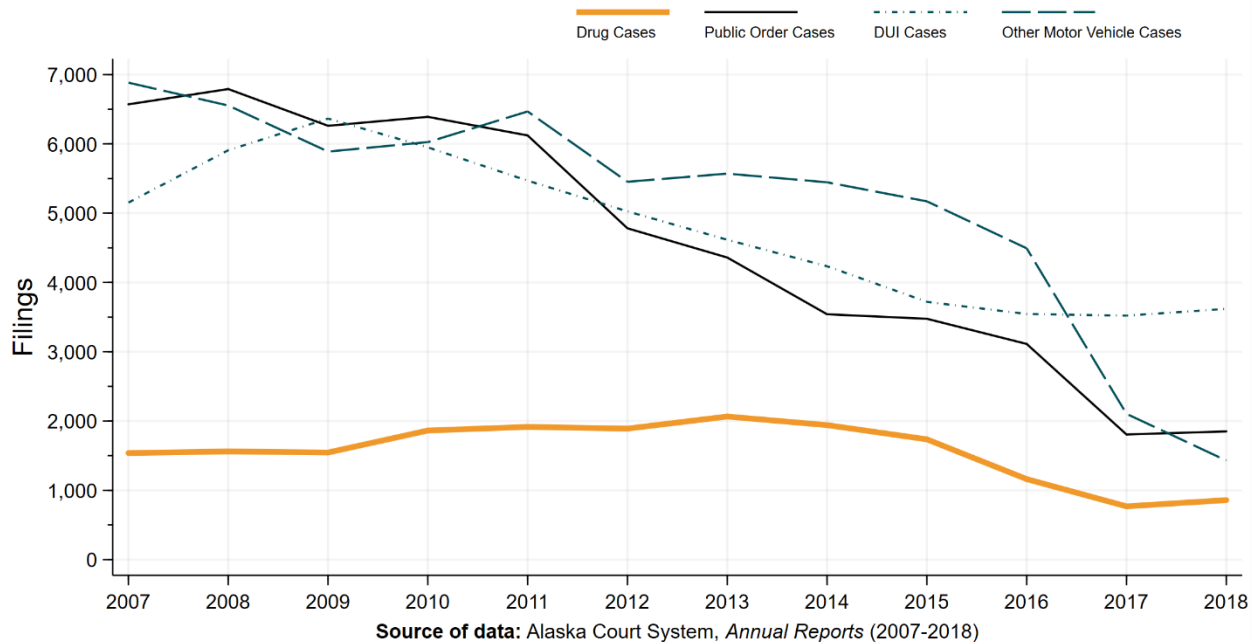
then decreased. Combined felony and misdemeanor drug case filings decreased by 44.1%, from 1,538 in 2007 to 859 in 2018.

Figure 4 additionally shows combined felony and misdemeanor public order, DUI, and other motor vehicle cases. (“Other motor vehicle” does not include motor vehicle theft, which is included in property crimes.) These three case types have been historically the most common cases filed in the Alaska District Court and account for the vast majority of the decline in cases filed. There was a 71.8% decrease in public order cases (6,571 in 2007 to 1,850 in 2018), a 29.8% decrease in DUIs (5,153 to 3,619), and a 79.2% decrease in other motor vehicle cases (6,884 to 1,430).

### SUMMARY

From 2007 to 2018, misdemeanors filed in Alaska trial courts decreased while felonies filed increased. The majority of the increase in total felony filings have come from violent, property, and weapons cases. The majority of the decline in district court cases is due to declining filings in public order, DUI, and other motor vehicle cases.

**Figure 4**  
Drug, Public Order, DUI & Other Motor Vehicle Case Filings FY 2007-2018



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# Notes

## REFERENCES

Alaska Court System annual reports are available online at: <http://courts.alaska.gov/admin/index.htm>.

## CRIMINAL CASE CATEGORIES

**Person/violent** – Homicide, assault, reckless endangerment, kidnapping, custodial interference, human trafficking, sex offenses, robbery, extortion, coercion.

**Property** – Theft, burglary, criminal trespass, vehicle theft, arson, criminal mischief, business and commercial offenses.

**Drugs** – Misconduct involving a controlled substance, manufacture, delivery or possession of imitation of controlled substance.

**Weapons** – Misconduct involving weapons, criminal possession of explosives, unlawful furnishing of explosives.

**Public Order** – Riot, disorderly conduct, harassment, indecent viewing or photography, possess or distribute child pornography, cruelty to animals, recruiting gang members, gambling, alcohol licensing laws.

**Motor Vehicle DUI** – Operating a vehicle, aircraft, watercraft, or commercial motor vehicle while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage, inhalant, or controlled substance.

**Motor Vehicle Other** – All non-violation offenses involving motor vehicles or their use that do not fall under DUI.

## NOTE

Criminal cases typically contain multiple charges. The Alaska Court System categorizes cases for reporting purposes based on the most serious charge.

Prior to 2010, not all Alaska courts had fully converted to CourtView. Consequently, some case classifications for filings for the years 2007, 2008, and 2009 may not be accurate. More specifically, felony case filings for this period may be undercounted, and misdemeanor case filings may be overcounted.

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# Alaska Justice Information Center



## ABOUT

The Alaska Justice Information Center (AJiC) was established in 2015, with a mission to compile, analyze, and report on criminal justice topics to policymakers, and practitioners in order to improve public safety, to increase criminal justice system accountability, and to reduce recidivism. In 2017, AJiC merged with the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Center (AJSAC), which was designated as Alaska's statistical analysis center in 1986 by Governor William Sheffield. The fact sheet series was previously published under the AJSAC masthead.

Since 1972, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and its predecessor agency, the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, have provided support to state and territorial governments to establish and operate Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) to collect, analyze, and report statistics on crime and justice to federal, state, and local levels of government, and to share state-level information nationally. There are currently 53 SACs located in the United States and its Territories. The Alaska SAC is a member of the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA), a national nonprofit organization comprised of SAC directors, researchers, and practitioners dedicated to policy-oriented research and analysis.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

### Location

The Alaska Justice Information Center (AJiC) is housed in the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center, which is located on the second floor of the UAA/APU Consortium Library, Suite 213.

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## ON THE WEB

To learn more about AJiC research, please visit our website at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/ajic>.

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